

THE CERTIFICATE OF COMMISSION:
A COMMITMENT TO LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

New officers accept commissions into the military each year and pledge to diligently discharge the duties of the office to which they are appointed. The proposition advanced in this paper is that few officers know what is written in the Certificate of Commission and even fewer understand the leadership commitment associated with the commission. One objective is to understand the foundation upon which the commission is founded and the crucial prerequisite for effective military leadership. An additional objective is to clearly describe the obligation made by each officer. It is not enough to comprehend the commitment agreed to when an officer is commissioned. Officers must understand the foundation upon which that oath and commitment are established.

Through review of primary (source documents and a survey), secondary, and tertiary sources, this paper will trace the origin and meaning of the commission. It will address leadership qualities needed of effective leaders, as rooted in the commission. The paper will also review results of a survey given to current US officers on their views of the commission and their collective recommendation to conduct structured training courses that ensure members understand the meaning and purpose of the commission. Additionally, through the actions and words of officers who have served in the past, the project will highlight the officers' personal understandings of their commitment. Finally, based on the findings, the project will include appropriate recommendations.

Chapter 1

Introduction

There are many pressures in this world of ours today which dictate against a solemn and intensive contemplation of the oath an officer takes. But I do think that more attention should be devoted to the indoctrination of young officers, especially, of the obligations they as individual officers assume when they recite that oath. It is a responsibility that should not be taken easily. And its phraseology is disarmingly simple.

—Admiral Arleigh A. Burke
former Chief of Naval Operations

The purpose of this paper is to develop the understanding that a commission is a commitment to leadership built on tradition and values. The commission is the nation's way of entrusting its survivability in a particular group of people, the commissioned officers. The commission is the pledge and confirmation that the commissioned officer will defend the nation at all cost. To gain a full understanding of the commission, the writer will trace the foundation which establishes the service requirements, oath, certificate, and commitment to leadership of today's Armed Forces' officers.

The next chapter discusses the historic evolution of the constitution, the appointment and commissioning of officers, as well as the contents of the Oath of Office.

Chapter 3 takes a look at the Constitution of the United States to understand how the military derived its purpose for being and its right for existing. It also reviews the process by which an officer accepts his appointment into the officer corps when he takes the Oath

of Office. It also shows that the Certificate of Commissioning documents the appointment of officers into the military. It then goes on to discuss how the Code of Conduct bounds the officer's behavior—his commitment to leadership. The thrust of the chapter is to highlight how we tie these documents and commitments together.

Chapter 4 delves into the commitment that officers make when they become a part of the officer corps. This commitment, through the changing times and its varying leadership, involves the use of different terminology to express similar values. Great leaders such as General Douglas MacArthur used the terms Duty, Honor, Country to describe an officer's commitment. Our current Air Force leadership refers to the leadership values of Integrity first, Service before self and Excellence in all we do.

Chapter 5 looks to see if the Air Force has a problem. It reviews examples and indicators cited by senior leadership to determine if there is a problem with officers living up to their commitment. Recently, United States Air Force (USAF) leadership has placed greater emphasis in identifying and highlighting the USAF Core Values. Such emphasis seems to infer a problem does exist.

Chapter 6 discusses the writer's survey conducted within the Air Command and Staff College (ACSC). The survey attempts to ascertain if the officers surveyed have pride in their military profession. It also seeks support for two premises: initial, structured training should be given to ensure potential officers understand the commissioning process, its historical basis, constitutional foundation, and the inherent commitment to leadership they will make. The other premise is that recurrent training can serve to remind officers of values, desirable ethical practices and leadership responsibilities. The survey will serve to

reinforce the writer's opinion that the actions USAF senior leadership is taking, the Core Values Strategy, is appropriate whether a problem exists or not.

Finally, the chapter 7 summary reviews the findings that new officers accept a commission into the military and make a commitment the Certificate of Commission affirms. It shows that overwhelming numbers of officers say they did not read the document prior to accepting the oath but they do understand the commitment they have made. The survey also reinforced the writer's opinion the Air Force should establish a structured training program for pre-commissioning and recurrent training. The training program would give those trained a profound appreciation for the importance of their commitment as well as the importance of the USAF Core Values: Integrity first, Service before self, and Excellence in all we do.

Chapter 2

In The Beginning

We arm to parley. The security of the US and her ability to remain a strong and enduring world leader will depend upon her military strength and leadership.

—Winston Churchill¹

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines the word “oath” as a formal declaration or promise to fulfill a pledge, often calling upon God or some sacred image as witness.² The Random House College Dictionary further defines it as, “A solemn appeal to God or some revered person or thing to witness one’s determination to speak the truth or to keep a promise.”³ Lieutenant Colonel Thomas H. Reese, the Deputy Staff Judge Advocate at Sandia Air Base, defines the oath, as it applies to an officer, as “a pledge to perform an act faithfully and truthfully.”⁴

The oath of an officer goes back to ancient times. In ancient Rome, the military oath existed between the commanding general and his troops. The oath remained in effect during the current campaign and was binding only to the general with whom the troop made it. With each new general there was a new oath.

In about 100 BC, Marius introduced military service as a 20 year term. From that time on, leadership required the entire command to collectively take an oath. That oath remained in effect for the entire period of service, in the name of the state or the Emperor.

After the advent of Christianity, the preferred method for taking the oath was for the oath to be taken in holy places—particularly near the altar where the church positioned holy relics. Warriors, facing battle, pledged to remain true to the king or the cause, even if captured. Treason brought retributive justice. The mark of Judas was on any person that broke a trust or gave up a friend to his enemy. The fighter's code was limited to knightly concepts of duty, honor, country, loyalty, honesty, trustfulness, courage, and bravery.

Appointment of individuals as officers dates back to the time when George Washington served as General and Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. He was directed to take charge of the Army of the united colonies during the Revolutionary War. Washington also received power to temporarily fill any vacancies below the rank of colonel and given authority to commission officers. The colonial governments had sole responsibility for making permanent promotions and appointments.⁵

The first Continental officers came from the pool of leaders of the individual communities. They were products of the militia system, chosen for their experience, their ability to raise men, and especially for their political reliability. These men of merit and wealth were entrusted with leadership in every sphere of life because they had the greatest stake in society. In return, the leaders were obligated to serve society to the best of their abilities.⁶

The colonies secured their independence from Great Britain and formed the United States under the Articles of Confederation in 1777. Veterans that fought the Revolutionary War under the Articles of Confederation later became leaders of the newly established government, as patriots and leaders. The government struggled for several years to become an effective and just government. The Articles of Confederation did not

meet the needs of the nation. It placed too much authority in the hands of the states and created a dependency of Congress upon the states. Congress could not even levy and collect taxes or control interstate or foreign trade. It became evident that the nation's survival depended on turning over powers to Congress and other centralized government agencies the states would not control directly.

In the meantime, Washington saw the need to reorganize the Army. He felt that some incompetent officers were undermining the quality of the Army and blamed that problem on defects in the methods, Massachusetts particularly, used in selecting the officers. Washington urged Congress to retain sole control over commissions on the belief that such a policy would have an additional advantage of broadening the geographical base of the officer corps.⁷

To the contrary, some of the colonies believed they were in the best position to name the officers because they knew which individuals were most effective. However, Congress wished to strengthen its role as a national government and agreed to a compromise. Congress would be allowed to practice the custom of commissioning those nominated by the governments of the respective colonies.⁸ Eventually, the Continental Congress convened a conference in Philadelphia in May 1787 for the sole purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation. The 42 delegates from the individual states framed our Constitution during this conference. The conference later became known as the Constitutional Convention.⁹

Despite much controversy, disagreement and heated discussion over several of the issues, the delegates generally agreed on the role of the military. Several reasons accounted for their general consensus. First, the most emotional issues were those

regarding economic and political problems rather than the role of the military itself. Second, at least half of the delegates in attendance had first hand military experience, having served in the Revolutionary War.¹⁰ Additionally, George Washington, president of the Convention, served as a stabilizing influence having been the former Commander in Chief. Finally, all of the delegates were very familiar with significant events: the Revolutionary War, attempted coup d'état by the Continental Army, and Shay's Rebellion in Massachusetts. The lessons learned from these actions influenced their common opinions on the role the military should have.

The Revolutionary War set the basis for the delegates' decision there should be two basic forms of military: the regular standing army and the militia. The regular army was a highly disciplined force; the only force capable of defending against a foreign invasion. In contrast, the militia was a loosely disciplined group of men who could use a weapon and would best serve their states in confronting any small threats.

After a period of servitude, the Continental Army attempted a coup d'état as a show of disappointment with Congress, the inept government and the government's unwillingness to keep its promise of wages and pensions. The Continental Army also wanted George Washington as their king and pledged to revolt with or without him. However, Washington did manage to persuade them to abandon the coup, but not before the people realized a possibility for members to misuse their military power for personal gain existed. On the other hand, the coup did reinforce the delegates' general belief that a strong standing army is a threat to liberty.

Shay's Rebellion in Massachusetts also showed a vulnerability; a danger of not having a strong government. The federal government proved incapable of stopping the rebellion

which 2,000–3,000 men in armed bands, protesting the high cost of government and court proceedings instituted. They had to recruit a volunteer army out of Boston to repress the rebellion. The leaders realized then that the American public did not possess enough virtue to support a pure republic with minimal central control.¹¹ So, the delegates reviewed three options for overcoming this shortfall. After weighing the options, the delegates selected the best option—establish a republican government based on both virtue and realization that human beings will act in their own self interest. This option became the basis for our system of checks and balances.

The result of numerous debates was the final military structure based on three principles. First, a regular standing army under the command of a single commander is necessary to be effective in war. Second, a large standing army was too powerful and dangerous a force to put under a single person. Third, Americans, in general, can not be counted on to act virtuously, hence a system of checks and balances is required.

The newly forged Constitution of the United States of America embraced the role of the military. The new government established the Department of War with its associated secretary under it and required every enlisted or commissioned person to take an oath of allegiance. The commissioned officers were appointed by the President, and all persons in the Army were referred to as “in the service of the United States.”¹²

The first oath given to an officer of the United States was presented on 1 June 1789.¹³ It was simple and quite short: “I, (FULL NAME), do solemnly swear or affirm (as the case may be) that I will defend the Constitution of the United States.” In less than one year, Congress changed the required oath from one of supporting the Constitution to one asserting that true allegiance was due the United States of America. It also declared that

the person would not only obey the President of the United States, but also obey the orders of the other officers appointed over him. This oath of “true” allegiance lasted until 2 July 1862, until the advent of the Civil War. At that time Congress enacted the current, famous oath and made it applicable not only to officers, but to every person elected or appointed to any office under the Federal Constitution. Chapter 3 further discusses the current Oath of Office that officers take.

Notes

¹Maj Carl E. Horton, “Duty, Honor, Country, Are They Important,” Research Report no. 1160–77 (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 1977), 4.

²*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1970 ed.

³Random House Dictionary, 1975 ed.

⁴Lt Col Thomas H. Reese, “An Officer’s Oath, “ *Military Review*, no. 40:24–31 (January 1964): 24.

⁵Robert K. Wright, Jr., *The Continental Army* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army (Army Lineage Series), 1983), 25.

⁶*Ibid.*, 44.

⁷*Ibid.*, 55.

⁸*Ibid.*, 76.

⁹Maj Larry A. Helgeson, “Moral Obligations from our Oath of Office to the US Constitution,” Research Report no.87–1155 (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 1977), 5.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 8.

¹²Col William A. Ganoe, *The History of the United States Army* (New York, NY: D. Appleton–Century Company, 1942), 95.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 25.

Chapter 3

The Ties That Bind

History is the source on which you must constantly draw. Do not read history to learn history, but to learn war, morals, and politics.

—Brigadier General Bernard E. Bee
Battle of First Bull Run, 21 July 1861

If we ignore the historical importance of our profession, the society from which it comes, and why it is worth preserving, we run the risk of the guardians not valuing what they guard.

—General John A. Wickham

Cadets and officer candidates usually attend schools specifically designated for commissioning the officer corps. The United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), Reserve Officer Training Course (ROTC) and Officer Training School (OTS) are the primary pre-commissioning (assessment) schools with the expressed purpose for supplying commissioned officers. The schools' missions are generally to educate and train individuals in the fundamentals of leadership, characteristics of good leaders, and the application of basic military skills so critical of effective officers. A cadet or officer candidate receives a commission when he shows ability to acquire the desired attributes, qualities and skills to become a successful officer.

A cadet or officer candidate must receive certain critical information before he takes his Oath of Office and accepts the Certificate of Commission. It is a good idea for the

individual to fully understand his commitment to leadership as well as the foundation upon which that commitment was built. An individual should receive this training before he enters into his commissioned rank of military service. The training should include the major documents upon which the commissioning founded.

The Constitution of the United States of America sets forth the responsibilities and duties of an officer. The officer accepts those responsibilities and duties when he takes the Oath of Office. The Certificate of Commission is the President's agreement (as delegated to the Secretary of Defense) to accept the officer's vow and to appoint him into the officer corps. Lastly, the Code of Conduct bounds the extent of the officer's commitment. We will look at each document in more detail in order to have a better understanding of an officer's commitment.

The Constitution

The Constitutional Convention realized the importance of a common defense of the states. It incorporated that and the ideals of the Declaration of Independence into the preamble of the Constitution. The Convention produced the Constitution of the United States of America to protect the personal rights and freedoms of all Americans. They also established it to set forth the responsibilities of all citizens to provide and secure those rights and freedoms. The Preamble to the Constitution states:

We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.¹

The delegates incorporated a system of checks and balances in the Constitution by entrusting Congress and the President with specific functions in controlling the military.

Article I, Section 8. The Congress shall have Power...and provide for the common Defense and general Welfare of the United States;...To define and punish Piracies and Felonies committed on the high Seas, and Offenses against the Law of Nations; To declare War, grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, and make Rules concerning Captures on Land and Water; To raise and support Armies but no Appropriation of Money to that Use shall be for a longer Term than two Years; To provide and maintain a Navy; To make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval Forces; To provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions; To provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining the Militia, and for governing such Part of them as may be employed in the Service of the United States, reserving to the States respectively, the Appointment of the Officers, and the Authority of training the Militia according to the discipline prescribed by Congress;...²

Article II, Section 2. The President shall be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia if the several States, when called into the actual Service of the United States;...³

Article II, Section 3. ...; he shall take care that the laws be faithfully executed, and shall commission all the officers of the United States.⁴

The delegates were very proficient in incorporating protective measures into the Constitution. The Constitution of the United States separates the powers of government in order to prevent dictatorship. While the President has direct authority as Commander in Chief of the military, all expressed power over the military is given to Congress who also determines the size and equipping of the forces. Congress has the power to “declare” war, the President power to respond to invasions. The President approves all military promotions. Limiting the appropriations to two years prevents Congress from being able to raise a large army against the will of the people.

The Constitution serves as the bedrock of authority and the responsibility upon which the Oath of Office is instituted. The Oath of Office directly links back to the Constitution and is the promise officers make to leadership.

The Oath of Office

I (Full Name) having been appointed a (Rank) in the United States Air Force, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter. So help me God.⁵

After the individual takes the Oath of Office, he receives a Certificate of Commission.

That certificate, a legal document conferred ultimately by the President of the United States, confirms the importance of the duties and responsibilities of the officer.

The Certificate of Commission

To all who shall see these presents, greeting:

Know ye, reposing special trust and confidence in the patriotism, valor, fidelity and abilities of (Full Name) , I do appoint Him/Her , Rank in the

United States Air Force

to DATE as such from the Number day of Month , nineteen hundred and Year . This officer will therefore carefully and diligently discharge the duties of the office to which appointed by doing and performing all manner of things thereunto belonging.

And I do strictly charge and require those officers and other personnel of lessor rank to render such obedience as is due an officer of this grade and position. And this officer is to observe and follow such orders and directions from time to time, as may be given by the President of the United States of America, or other superior officers acting in accordance with the laws of the United States of America. This commission is to

continue in force during the pleasure of the President of the United States of America, under the provisions of those public laws relating to Officers of the Armed Forces Of The United States Of America and the component thereof in which this appointment is made... Signed by the Secretary of the Air Force as delegated by the President of the United States of America.⁶

The officer, having accepted the Oath of Office and received the Certificate of Commission, is compelled by the Code of Conduct to be willing and ready to give his life in the defense of his country and the American way of life.

The Code of Conduct

Article I: I am an American fighting man. I serve in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense.

Article VI: I will never forget that I am an American fighting man, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free. I will trust in my God and in the United States of America.⁷

An officer is appointed into the officer corps only after proving he has the leadership qualities and potential of an officer. His military responsibilities and duties are rooted in the Constitution of the United States and bounded by the Code of Conduct. In essence, the officer vows to conduct himself accordingly as he supports and defends the Constitution of the United States, its people, and their way of life against all enemies and at all cost, maybe even the loss of his own life.

Notes

¹Webster's New Reference Library, 1989 ed., "The Constitution of the United States."

²Ibid., 982.

³Ibid., 984.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Cited in Air Force Instruction 36-2006, *Oath of Office (Military Personnel) and Certificate of Commission*, 6 July 1994.

⁶Ibid.

Notes

⁷Col Jeffrey C. Benton, *Air Force Officer's Guide*, 31st ed. (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1996), 14.

Chapter 4

The Terms

If you treat a man as he is, he will remain as he is; if you treat him as if he were what he could be, he will become what he could be.

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

As stated previously, pre-commissioning schools (USAFA, OTS, and ROTC) are responsible for training cadets and officer candidates in the necessary attributes, qualities and skills to become a successful officer. A cadet or officer candidate is offered a commission after he demonstrates a potential for leadership. Acceptance of that commission is a vow to perform his duties in the Air Force to the best of his abilities and to support and defend the Constitution of the United States at all cost. It is his moral obligation to carry on the traditions of dedication to duty and to public service. That tradition is established and immortalized by countless military officers preceding him. He, in turn, will build upon that tradition for future generations.

Taking the vow, reciting the Oath of Office, is an acceptance of the same demands today that citizen soldiers have embodied since the Revolutionary War. Meeting this obligation, this calling, requires today's officers to have virtually the same values as those of the officers of the past. Receiving the Certificate of Commission confirms to the new officer that he has made a vow that his Commander in Chief, the President, trusts he will keep. The statement, "reposing special trust and confidence in the patriotism, valor,

fidelity and abilities of (Full Name), I do appoint (Him/Her)..." found in the Certificate of Commission, expresses the trust and confidence the President places in an officer's future actions.

Chapter 3 showed the officer's commitment to leadership that is founded in the Constitution, the Oath of Office and the Certificate of Commission. The Certificate of Commission serves as a good source for illustrating values associated with that commitment. Let's first define the terms of expectation incorporated in the certificate: patriotism, valor, fidelity, and abilities.¹ Patriotism is "devoted love, support, and defense of one's country." Valor is "boldness or determination in facing great danger, as in battle." Fidelity is a "strict observance of promises, duties, etc." Lastly, abilities are "competencies in an activity or occupation."

Throughout time the most profound values having the most historic significance are the values Duty-Honor-Country. Finding a definition that truly embodies all that is meant by these three terms is virtually impossible. However, the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* provides the following definitions. Duty is "an act or a course of action that is exacted of one by position, social custom, law, or religion; a moral obligation; and the compulsion to meet such obligation." Honor has many definitions of which the following were selected, "reputation; good name; a code principally of male dignity, integrity, and pride, maintained in some societies by force of arms; and personal integrity maintained without legal or other obligation." Country is simply defined as, "the territory of a nation or state; land." The importance of these values was best expressed in a speech given to the Corps of Cadets, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY,

on 12 May 1962 by General of the Army, Douglas A. MacArthur. The following segments of his speech are the most eloquent depiction of Duty–Honor–Country:

The code that those words [Duty–Honor–Country] perpetuate embraces the highest moral laws and will stand the test of any ethics or philosophies ever promulgated for the uplift of mankind. Its requirements are for the things that are right, and its restraints are from the things that are wrong. The soldier, above all other men, is required to practice the greatest act of religious training—sacrifice. In battle and in the face of danger and death, he discloses those divine attributes above which his Maker gave when he created man in his own image. No physical courage and no brute instinct can take the place of the Divine help which alone can sustain him. However horrible the incidents of war may be, the soldier who is called upon to offer and give his life for his country, is the noblest development of mankind.

And through this welter of change and environment, your mission remains fixed, determined, inviolable—it is to win our wars. Everything else in your professional career is but corollary to this vital dedication. All other public purposes, all other public projects, all other public needs, great or small, will find others for their accomplishment; but you are the ones who are trained to fight; yours is the profession of arms—the will to win, the sure knowledge that in war there is no substitute for victory; that if you lose, the nation will be destroyed; that the very obsession of your public service must be Duty–Honor–Country...For a century and a half you have defended, guarded, and protected its hallowed traditions of liberty and freedom, of right and justice.²

A document reportedly distributed to reception stations and pre-commissioning schools similarly correlates the Oath of Office with distinct values: courage, commitment, candor and competence. The document states that acceptance of and adherence to these values will lead to a successful and rewarding career like that of the citizen soldier. That document looks at the Oath of Office and addresses the four values as follows:

1. "... I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic;...", you accept the challenge to exhibit **courage**—the mental or moral strength to venture, persevere and withstand danger, fear or difficulty in the performance of your duties.
2. "...that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same;...", you accept the challenge to exhibit **commitment**—dedication to proudly serving your nation as a member of the total team. Taking the forms of patriotism and esprit de corps, daily

operations must include commitment to maximize both individual and team productivity.

3. "...that I take this obligation freely without mental reservation or purpose of evasion;...", you accept the challenge to exhibit **candor**—honesty in what you say in addition to how you act. The Profession of Arms leaves no room for half-truth. The accuracy of information exchanged by the team must be absolute.
4. "...I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter. So help me God.", you accept the challenge to exhibit **competence**—willingness to know your job, do your best and develop your abilities to the utmost. The United States Armed Forces is the best in the world of being able to expect the dedication to excellence of each team member.³

Now turning to present leadership: the Chief, Joint Chiefs of Staff outlined four values he feels all military members, with a potential for serving in joint warfare, should possess. The first is **integrity**, the cornerstone for building trust—where members say what they mean and do what they say. Secondly, **competence**, cements the mutual cohesion between leader and follower. Thirdly, **physical courage**, is a value of military members that knows no bounds. Individual fighting spirit and physical courage forge the spirit for battle teamwork. Lastly, **moral courage** is the willingness to stand up for what we believe is right. It includes risk taking and tenacity where decisions are made in the face of uncertainty, accepting full responsibility for the outcome.⁴

Let's turn now to the USAF military department. Air Force Executive Guidance, published by the Secretary of the Air Force (SECAF) and Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF), identify three Air Force Core Values: Integrity first, Service before self, and Excellence in all we do. Air Force members are expected to understand, cherish, and adopt these values as a way of life. The values are considered as more than mere standards. They should inspire us to always do our best which in turn will get the mission done. These values are touted as the bond among all comrades in arms and the glue that unifies the force and connects us with great warriors and public servants of the past.⁵

Integrity is a character trait—willingness to do right even when no one is looking. It is the inner voice; the voice of self-control; the basis for trust imperative in today's military. Integrity is essential in the military where we count on people to do their part.⁶ Integrity contains other moral traits indispensable to national service: courage, honesty, responsibility, accountability, justice, self-respect and humility.⁷

Service before self tells us that professional duties take precedence over personal desires. It includes the following behaviors: rule following, respect for others, discipline and self-control (in the areas of anger, appetites, and religious toleration), and faith in the system.⁸ Members subordinate their personal interest for the good of their unit, the Air Force, the Nation. They have also embraced what Gen. Sir John Hackett purportedly called the “unlimited liability clause”: a willingness, if called upon to do so, to risk their lives in the defense of our nation, its democratic values, and its citizens.⁹

Excellence in all we do directs us to develop a sustained passion for continuous improvement and innovation that will propel the Air Force into a long-term, upward spiral of accomplishment and performance. It embodies the behaviors of product and service excellence, personal excellence, community excellence (of which mutual respect and benefit of the doubt influence interpersonal excellence), resources excellence (both material and human) and operations excellence (internal and external).¹⁰ One must understand that his responsibility for America's security requires the moral imperative to seek excellence in all his military activities. He works hard to develop his skills, and seeks to become the very best at what he does. He routinely gives his all to each and every task—no matter how small the task or seemingly insignificant.¹¹

SECAF has remarked there is no unique set of core values. However, the nature of military service, including the sacrifice of self and possibly one's life, puts importance on the need to develop and sustain values. SECAF desired to select a compact set of values absolutely essential for the correct functioning of the Air Force system, a set that closely articulates the values of Duty, Honor, Country.¹²

Notes

¹The Random House College Dictionary, 1975 ed.

²Army Pamphlet 16-11, *Character Guidance Discussion Topics Duty-Honor-Country*, 25 April 1969.

³*Your Oath: Defending the Constitution Our Common Bond* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1987), n.p.

⁴Joint Pub 1. "*Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States*." January, 1995, vi-vii.

⁵United States Air Force Core Values, *The Little Blue Book*, 1 January 1997, n.p.

⁶Gen Ronald R. Fogleman, "Fogleman: Our Behavior Must Merit Trust, Respect," *Maxwell-Gunter Dispatch*, no. 50:1+ (Apr 26 1996): 4.

⁷United States Air Force Core Values, *The Little Blue Book*, 1 January 1997, n.p.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Gen Ronald R. Fogleman, "Fogleman: Our Behavior Must Merit Trust, Respect," *Maxwell-Gunter Dispatch*, no. 50:1+ (Apr 26 1996): 4.

¹⁰United States Air Force Core Values, *The Little Blue Book*, 1 January 1997, n.p.

¹¹Gen Ronald R. Fogleman, "Fogleman: Our Behavior Must Merit Trust, Respect," *Maxwell-Gunter Dispatch*, no. 50:1+ (Apr 26 1996): 4.

¹²United States Air Force Academy. *Excerpts from a speech to the Joint Services Conference on Professional Ethics*, 1993, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 8 February 1997, available from <http://www.usafa.af.mil/core-value/widnall.html>.

Chapter 5

I Do...The Promise

When an officer swears to ‘support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic,’ he is assuming the most formidable obligation he will encounter in his life. Thousands upon thousands of men and women have died to preserve for him the opportunity to take such an oath. What he is actually doing is pledging his means, his talent, his very life to his country. This is an obligation that falls to relatively few men. And it should be considered as a sacred truth. We hear these days about the ‘rights’ to which we are entitled as citizens of this great nation. There is less emotion about the corresponding ‘duties’ which we inherit.

—Admiral Arleigh A. Burke
former Chief of Naval Operations

When officers make their vow, recite the Oath of Office, they agree to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic. They also vow to accomplish their responsibilities in accordance with the certain values that have always been a necessary part of the profession of arms. Past officers vowed to live up to their commitment embracing the values of Duty–Honor–Country or a host of other values such as competence, candor, courage, commitment that have similar meaning (Table 1). Today, Air Force leadership expects everyone to espouse the values of Integrity first, Service before self, and Excellence in all we do.

While dutifully accomplishing a task directed by a past supervisor, the writer came across a document stored with other files dating to the early 1980s. The document looks

official but only has the number, I196M-1, embossed on it. This document is an officer's promise and reflects on values that leaders have historically embraced.

THE COMMISSIONED OFFICER

No one is more professional than I. I am a commissioned officer, a leader of people. I am proud of the commissioned officer corps and will at all times conduct myself so as to bring credit upon it. I will not use my grade or position to attain profit or safety.

Competence is my watch-word. I will strive to remain tactically and technically proficient. I will always be aware of my role as a commissioned officer; I will fulfill my responsibilities and display professionalism at all times. I will strive to know my subordinates and use their skills to the maximum degree possible. I will always place their needs above my own and communicate with my superiors and my people and never leave them uninformed.

I will exert every effort and risk any ridicule to successfully accomplish my assigned duties. I will not look at a person and see any race, color, religion, sex, age, or national origin, for I will see only the person; nor will I ever show prejudice or bias. I will lead by direction and will resort to disciplinary action only when necessary. I will carry out orders to the best of my ability and always obey the decisions of my superiors.

I will give all officers my maximum support to ensure mission accomplishment. I will earn their respect, obey their orders, and establish a high degree of integrity with them. I will exercise initiative in the absence of orders, make decisive and accurate decisions. I will not compromise my integrity, nor my moral courage. I will not forget that I am a professional, I am a leader — I am a

COMMISSIONED OFFICER.

Table 1. Values at a Glance

<u>General</u> <u>MacArthur</u>	<u>Certificate of</u> <u>Commission</u>	<u>Oath of</u> <u>Office</u>	<u>CJCS</u>	<u>SECAF/CSAF</u>
Duty	Ability	Competence	Competence	Excellence in all we do
Honor	Fidelity	Candor	Integrity	Integrity first
	Valor		Moral Courage	
Country	Patriotism	Courage	Physical Courage	Service Before Self
		Commitment		

Chapter 6

Is There a Problem?

Any fault recognized is half corrected.

—Anonymous

All throughout life people are influenced by the world around them, by things they hear and read and by things they see others do. Values play a critical role in those behaviors that people display as they carry out their responsibilities. Even in today's military, people observe inequities in discipline and standard operating procedures, inadequacies of leadership, and unscrupulous morals (values). Patriotism is at a low level (evidenced by the unwillingness of several officers to serve during the Gulf War). Moral values are in a state of fluctuation (officers lead by different values-based ideologies). Additionally, self-centeredness is on the rise (this is fast becoming a "me" society).

Is there a problem that needs attention? When reviewing recent discussions, speeches, and articles, we repeatedly observe the majority of topics are about core values and leadership commitment. The Air Force usually places emphasis on topics of greatest concern. The fact that the Air Force is concentrating on core values and core value-related topics seem to imply there is a problem creeping up, and USAF leadership is concerned.

One such example are the following statements made by Dr. Sheila E. Widnall, SECAF, at a recent conference:

The Air Force requires a high level of professional skill, a 24-hour a day commitment, and a willingness to make personal sacrifices. Unfortunately, we have all seen what happens when people forget that basic tenet. Examples of careerism and self interest are present at every level, but they do the most damage when they are displayed by the leader. If the leader is unwilling to sacrifice individual goals for the good of the unit, it's hard to convince other unit members to do so. At that point, the mission suffers, and the ripple effects can be devastating.¹

The following remarks by General Fogleman, CSAF, also express their concern:

Several incidences have shown that some military members do not understand their commitment and are not living up to the responsibilities they assumed as Air Force professionals. There have been numerous disturbing scandals: senior NCOs and officers embroiled in adulterous fraternization, senseless airplane crashes, the tragic shootdown of the Blackhawk helicopters, and cases of harassment.

These big ticket scandals don't happen in a vacuum. Usually they aren't caused by evil people acting on impulse. The people involved knew the difference between right and wrong, and they knew what professionalism demanded in these situations.²

Another illustration is the following statement by General Fogleman in a recent commentary:

Lately we have seen some indications that there are some people who do not understand the unique requirements of our military profession, a profession that exists to fight and win America's wars. As military people, we voluntarily have taken an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. Along with that oath, we are entrusted with the security of our great nation in a still-dangerous world. The tools of our trade are lethal. We engage in operations that involve the risk to human life and national treasure. Because of what we do our standards must be higher than those that prevail in society at large... Our responsibility for safeguarding America is far too important and too critical to allow it to be jeopardized by those unwilling to measure up. Most Air Force professionals place service before self and willingly subordinate personal interests for the good of their unit, the Air Force and the nation and, if called upon, are willing to risk their lives in the defense of the United States...³

Other indicative comments were made by past and current Armed Forces leaders during symposiums held at ACSC.⁴ Such comments included:

1. Officers are too careerist. They are more worried about themselves and not as worried about the larger cause.
2. Professional decisions should be made for the goodness of our service, our nation and not for ourselves.
3. More formalized training is needed to teach officers to be more productive; to be better leaders of tomorrow.

Carl Builder, the author of one of the ACSC course books, *The Icarus Syndrome*, included remarks about the Air Force in his analysis. He referred to the following comments others made in *A View of the Air Force Today*. Referring to those comments, Mr. Builder wrote, “The American culture has changed; and the attitudes and values of those in the Air Force will naturally reflect those changes... The problem, if there is one, is not significant or unique within the Air Force... Some believe that the Air Force, as an institution, is in trouble and needs to find and take corrective actions to ensure its future viability. The Air Force is losing its competitiveness, its principles, and its sense of direction... Air Force people are increasingly favoring their own careers and interests over that of the Air Force mission or institution.” He also stated, “If the Air Force has an institutional problem, it won’t be made better by wallowing in it... What is needed is not more questioning or analysis, but pride in, and dedication to the institution...”⁵

However, Mr. Builder reports he has a different opinion. He feels the problems are indeed serious and unique to the Air Force. He states, “...[The problems] need to be understood if they are to be wisely corrected. If accepted, they urge informed intervention...if required, it [informed intervention] needs to be planned and executed completely like surgery.”⁶

Further evidence is the fact that USAF leadership has recently placed great emphasis in identifying the USAF Core Values. They designed a strategy to incorporate the values into daily operations. They developed and distributed a new booklet, describing each core value, to all members. They expect members to read and then live by the values and attributes (Appendix A) that the booklet directly and implicitly express. Additionally, SECAF and CSAF have directed that existing training programs cover the importance of Core Values and the impact they have on leadership, preparing members for the next level of responsibility.

Again, does this attention that USAF leadership has recently placed on identifying the USAF Core Values and developing a strategy to incorporate them into daily operations mean that we have a problem?

Notes

¹United States Air Force Academy. *Excerpts from a speech to the Joint Services Conference on Professional Ethics*, 1993, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 8 February 1997, available from <http://www.usafa.af.mil/core-value/widnall.html>.

²United States Air Force Core Values, *The Little Blue Book*, 1 January 1997, n.p.

³Gen Ronald R. Fogleman, "What the Air Force Expects of You," *Air Force Times*, no. 56:33 (May 13 1996): 33.

⁴"*Leadership and Command Series*," lectures, Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, AL, 13 August 1996– 13 February 1997.

⁵Carl H. Builder, *The Icarus Syndrome* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1996), 20–22.

⁶*Ibid.*, 22.

Chapter 7

What Should We Do?—The Survey

A good soldier, whether he leads a platoon or an army, is expected to look backward as well as forward, but he must think only forward.

—General Douglas MacArthur

Should the Air Force train potential officers in the purpose and meaning of the commission; the commissioning process itself, its historical basis, and constitutional foundation; and provide them an understanding in the concepts and application of the Air Force Core Values? We must also ingrain in the individual a strong commitment to leadership, steeped in tradition.

The writer administered a survey (Appendix B) to the students of the ACSC Class of 1997. The distribution of Air Force officers at ACSC is considered representative of the cross-section of functional skills held by officers throughout the Air Force. The statistics received from this cross-section should represent statistics one could similarly expect the population of Air Force officers to provide. Surveys were distributed randomly and responses were received anonymously. Statistics were extrapolated from a total of 92 responses that were properly completed.

The first purpose of the survey is to ascertain if the officers surveyed have pride in their military profession. An officer who chooses to read his Certificate of Commission and/or display the document is considered to be showing a sense of pride in his

commission. The second purpose provides support for two premises: cadets and potential officers should attend a structured training course. That training will ensure the individuals understand the commissioning process, its historic basis, constitutional foundation, and the inherent commitment to leadership they have made. The other premise is that a recurrent, structured training course can serve to remind officers of values, desirable ethical practices and leadership responsibilities.

Pride is in Showing and Knowing

Survey responses show that officers have pride in their military profession. More than 95 percent of the officers surveyed have either read their Certificate of Commission or had it read to them. Of these officers, 51 percent did so before their commissioning ceremony. When looking at the population of Air Force officers surveyed, virtually 94 percent know what the Certificate of Commission states. They understand its purpose and meaning, the commitment they have made as officers, and they care what that commitment is. The results derived from inquiring about whether or not surveyed officers display their certificates are indecisive. Only 50 percent of the officers display their certificate. Several said they do not display the certificate because they “move too much” or “they choose to keep it packed away.” No one made any remarks or gave any reasons that would infer a lack of desire to display the certificate, and therefore a lack of pride.

Tell Them More

Sixty-one percent of Air Force officers feel that structured training should be held, while 34 percent feel such training is not needed. It is interesting to note that the people that said they do not see a need for structured training to be held also did not receive

similar training. On the other hand, only 18 percent of those people proposing establishment of structured training had attended a similar training course. Those that received training reported they received the training either at recruitment centers or pre-commissioning sources; the overwhelming majority of the training being received at the pre-commissioning locations. Similarly, survey participants feel structured training should at least be held at the pre-commissioning locations, not the recruitment centers. They suggest that subsequent training be held at Squadron Officer School (second largest proposal after the pre-commissioning selection). Only a few participants suggest that training be held at ACSC, Air War College (AWC), or at one's duty location.

Survey results show that Air Force officers are more informed of the purpose and meaning of the commission than the Armed Forces population as a whole. Similar differences are seen when other survey responses are compared between those of Air Force members and the remainder of the Armed Forces. It is important to note that the ACSC class is not a good representation of the make up of the active duty Armed Forces.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

Life is the art of drawing sufficient conclusions from insufficient premises.

—Samuel Butler

We have looked at the commissioning process as it derives from the Constitution of the United States of America to the Air Force Core Values that Air Force officers operationalize as they carry out their commitment to leadership. As we saw, new officers accept commissions into the military each year and pledge to diligently discharge the duties of the office to which they are appointed.

The proposition advanced in this paper is that few officers have knowledge of the wording of the Certificate of Commission and even fewer understand the leadership commitment associated with the commission. Survey results show that officers do have knowledge of the actual wording of the Certificate of Commission. However, it did not prove or disprove the supposition that officers understand the leadership commitment associated with the commission.

We described the obligation each officer makes, the foundation upon which that obligation and commitment are established and the crucial prerequisites for effective military leadership.

Through the review of primary (source documents and a survey), secondary, and tertiary sources, this paper traced the origin and meaning of the commission. It addressed the leadership qualities needed of effective leaders, as rooted in the commission. The paper reviewed the results of a survey given to current US officers. Results showed today's young leaders concur with establishing initial and recurrent structured training courses that ensure members understand the meaning and purpose of the commission.

We saw that SECAF and CSAF have directed development and institutionalization of a Core Values Strategy to spread the word on the Air Force Core Values: Integrity first, Service before self, and Excellence in all we do. The strategy is projected to operationalize those values and establish a recurring education and training program at all levels that addresses those values and the everyday roles of those values.

However, it is not enough to have a recurring program that trains officers on the meaning of the values and their importance to the Air Force. A structured program must include an initial, pre-commissioning training program that the Air Force administers prior to an individual's actual commissioning. (Findings of the survey support creation of a structured pre-commissioning program that covers the commissioning process, its historical basis, constitutional foundation, and the officer's inherent commitment to leadership.) Such training would give officers a more traditional link to their commitment. Such tradition and patriotism separates the calling from a job.

Then, recurrent training at such schools as SOS, ACSC, and AWC could serve to remind members of desirable ethical practices and leadership responsibilities, thereby adjusting any negative (potentially destructive) behaviors to a desirable standard. The pre-

commissioning training program would also serve to forge greater bonds between the officers and their profession.

In other words, officers would have a new found sense of the importance of the military, how critical their role is, and the leadership qualities that made the outstanding leaders so successful. They would receive a profound appreciation for the importance of Duty–Honor–Country, or as we coin them today, Integrity first, Service before self, and Excellence in all we do.

Appendix A

Terms from “The Little Blue Book”

accountability. A person of integrity accepts the blame and does not take credit for the work of others.

anger. Military professionals must refrain from displays of anger that would bring discredit upon themselves and/or the Air Force.

appetite. Those who allow their appetites to drive them to make sexual overtures to subordinates are unfit for military service. Similarly, excessive consumption of alcohol casts doubt on an individual’s fitness.

benefit of the doubt. Before rushing to a judgment on a person, it’s important to have the whole story.

community excellence. Achieved when members of an organization can work together on the basis of trust and mutual respect.

discipline and self-control. Professionals must lead with a tone of confidence and forward-looking optimism.

faith in the system. To lose faith in the system is to adopt the view that you know better than those above you in the chain of command as to what should of should not be done. To do so is to place self before service.

human resources excellence. We recruit, train, promote, and retain those we actually need to do the job.

humility. A person of integrity grasps and is sobered by the awesome task of defending the Constitution of the United States of America.

justice. A person of integrity ensures those who do similar things get similar rewards or similar punishments.

material resources excellence. All equipment and property asked for must be mission essential.

mutual respect. Genuine respect involves viewing another person as an individual of fundamental worth.

openness. Professionals of integrity encourage free flow of information within the organization.

operations excellence. There are two kinds of operations excellence (internal and external). Internally, we do business from the unit to headquarters level within the Air Force. Externally, we look at the way we treat the world as we conduct our operations. We must be sensitive to other organizational operations both in peacetime and in war.

personal excellence. Military professionals must seek out and complete professional military education, stay in physical and mental shape, and continue to refresh their general educational backgrounds.

product and service excellence. We must focus on providing services and generating products that fully meet customer wants and anticipate customer needs and do so within the boundaries established by taxpayers.

religious toleration. Military professionals must remember that religious choice is a matter of individual conscience, and professionals, especially commanders, must not attempt to change or coercively influence the views of subordinates.

resources excellence. Aggressively implement policies to ensure the best possible cradle-to-grave management of resources.

respect for others. Service before self causes a good leader to place the troops' welfare ahead of his own personal comfort.

responsibility. A person of true integrity acknowledges his or her duties and acts accordingly.

rule following. To serve is to do one's duty, and our duties are most commonly expressed through rules which must be followed unless there is a clear, operational reason for refusing to do so.

self-respect. To have integrity is to respect oneself as a professional and a human being. The person would not act in such a way as to bring discredit upon himself or the organization to which he belongs.

Appendix B

ACSC Survey #97-06

This survey is to be taken by United States officers only. I'm writing a paper on the commitment officers make that is inherent in the Certificate of Commission and the Oath of Office. I'm proposing that we need to formally teach officers on the meaning and purpose of the commissioning process. I'd like your input to help formulate my position.

1. Are you in the United States Air Force?__Yes __No, (State Service) _____
2. What was your commissioning source? __Academy __OTS __ROTC __Other
3. Do you ever display your Certificate of Commission?
__Yes __No (Please check/comment as applicable)
 __Don't Desire to
 __Put it away to protect it
 __Other: Please give reason_____
4. Do you know where your Certificate of Commission is?__Yes __No
5. Have you read your Certificate of Commission?__Yes __No (**skip to #11**)
6. Did you read the Certificate of Commission before being commissioned?__Yes __No
7. Do you understand what the document says and means?__Yes __No
8. Do you understand your commitment?__Yes __No
9. Do you care what that commitment means?__Yes __No
10. Does the document and its contents have any bearing on your willingness to carry out your military duty?__Yes __No

SKIP TO #16

11. Has anyone ever told you what the document says and means?
__Yes __No (**skip to #18**)

12. Did they explain it to you before you received your commission?__Yes __No
13. Do you understand your commitment?__Yes __No
14. Do you care what that commitment means?__Yes __No
15. Does the document and its contents have any bearing on your willingness to carry out your military duty?__Yes __No
16. Did you ever attend a structured course, seminar, meeting, etc., that discussed the Certificate of Commissioning? __Yes __No (**skip to #18**)
17. Where did you attend the structured course? (Please check **all** that apply)
- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recruiter's office | <input type="checkbox"/> SOS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Academy | <input type="checkbox"/> ACSC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OTS | <input type="checkbox"/> AWC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ROTC | <input type="checkbox"/> Duty Location |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: Please tell where_____ | |
18. Should structured training be given to explain the meaning and purpose of the Certificate of Commissioning?__Yes __No (**skip to #22**)
19. Where should the training be held? (Please check **all** that apply.)
- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recruiter's office | <input type="checkbox"/> SOS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Academy | <input type="checkbox"/> ACSC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OTS | <input type="checkbox"/> AWC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ROTC | <input type="checkbox"/> Duty Location |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: Please tell where_____ | |
20. Should the training be held more than once?__Yes__No
21. If the training is only held once where should it be held?
- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Academy | <input type="checkbox"/> SOS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OTS | <input type="checkbox"/> ACSC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ROTC | <input type="checkbox"/> AWC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Duty Location | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: Please tell where_____ | |

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey.

Glossary

ACSC	Air Command and Staff College
AWC	Air War College
CJCS	Chief, Joint Chiefs of Staff
CSAF	Chief of Staff of the Air Force
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
OTS	Officer Training School
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Course
SECAF	Secretary of the Air Force
SOS	Squadron Officer School
USAF	United States Air Force
USAFA	United States Air Force Academy

abilities. The power or capacity to act physically, mentally, legally, morally, financially, etc. Competence in an activity or occupation.

candor. The state or quality of being frank, open and sincere in speech or expression.

commitment. A pledge or promise; obligation.

competence. The quality of having suitable or sufficient skill, knowledge, experience, etc., for some purpose.

country. Any considerable territory demarcated by specific conditions; region or district; state or nation.

courage. The quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain, etc., with firmness and without fear; bravery.

duty. Action or a task required by one's position or occupation; function.

fidelity. A strict observance of promises, duties, etc.

honor. The honesty or integrity in one's beliefs and actions.

honesty. This one word is the bond of the military professional. The bottom line is we don't lie and we can't justify any deviation.¹ Honesty is the glue that binds the members of an outfit into a cohesive team.²

integrity. The ability to hold together and properly regulate all of the elements of a personality. Where members say what they mean and do what they say.³

patriotism. The devoted love, support, and defense of one's country: national loyalty.

Notes

¹United States Air Force Core Values, *The Little Blue Book*, 1 January 1997, n.p.

²Gen Ronald R. Fogleman, "Fogleman: Our Behavior Must Merit Trust, Respect," *Maxwell-Gunter Dispatch*, no. 50:1+ (Apr 26 1996): 1,4.

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